

Robin, Genevieve and Paige's Annotated Bibliography

Lara, Adair. "Elements of an Effective Arc." *Writer's Digest* July 2010: 34-38

Lara's article helps illustrate how to write an effective emotional arc for a memoir. He utilizes many examples and illustrations to help show the process of creating an outline for a memoir. There is a helpful process of identifying a moment, taking the moment a part into its individual emotional parts, and constructing from that an outline or "arc" that is indispensable for the memoir genre.

"Autobiography." Wikipedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Nov 2010.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiography>.

This definition details how this particular genre relates to a person's memory of personal life story accounts. It also states how memoir writing is sometimes difficult to separate in definition.

"Memoir." Wikipedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Nov 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memoir>.

This definition provides the etymology of where the term originated and explains that even though it is a form of autobiographical writing, this genre is still different in structure because it focuses on the development of the author's personality.

Lott, Brett. "Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction." *Toward a Definition of Creative Nonfiction* 7.2 (2005): n. pag. Web. 12 Jan 2010.
<<http://msupress.msu.edu/journals/fg/lott.html>>.

Brett Lott, an American author residing Charleston, South Carolina, tries to define creative nonfiction by stating that it is "an attempt to keep from passing altogether away the lives we have lived." Although, he does not provide a definitive pronouncement of what creative nonfiction is, but he does imply that this particular genre cannot be defined, but only revealed to the person experimenting with it.

Pope, Aaron. "Lines in the Mud: Exploring Creative Non-Fiction." *Vancouver Island University*. Vancouver Island University, 2002. Web. 12 Jan 2010.
<<http://records.viu.ca/~soules/eng315/textbook/pope.htm>>.

Canadian writer Aaron Pope suggests truth is not pure or solid, but distorted as soon as it is handled and acknowledged. He says that CNF is not a genre that is built on truth and realities, but deals more with innuendos, subjective behavior and language.

Paige Ballard, Robin Wilson, Genevieve Raas
Prof. Fox
ENG 400
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What is creative nonfiction?

"[Creative nonfiction is] a desire not to let slip away our life as we have known it; to put an order, for better and worse, to our days; this is only a test; the self as continent, you as first explorer; is this wisdom or is this folly?"

-Brett Lott

Autobiography is a book about the life of a person, written by that person and it may be based entirely on the writer's memory. Closely associated with autobiography (and sometimes difficult to precisely distinguish from it) is memoir writing.

"Autobiography." *Wikipedia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Nov 2010.
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiography>>.

The literary genre, memoir (from the French: *mémoire* from the Latin *memoria*, meaning "memory", or a reminiscence), forms a subclass of autobiography – although the terms 'memoir' and 'autobiography' are almost interchangeable in modern vernacular. Memoir is autobiographical writing, but not all autobiographical writing follows the criteria for memoir.

Memoirs are structured differently from formal autobiographies which tend to encompass the writer's entire life span, focusing on the development of his or her personality. The chronological scope of a memoir is determined by the work's context and is therefore more focused and flexible than the traditional arc of birth to childhood to old age as found in an autobiography.

"Memoir." *Wikipedia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Nov 2010.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memoir>.

Goals:

To demonstrate how memoir writing can be used to focus on one specific life event using evocative and vivid imagery.

To glean from a specific section of one's life using intense and concentrated information.

Activity 2: The Telephone Game

Goals:

- To demonstrate how easily it is to forget dialogue, and to transition into a discussion of why some parts of memoir may be dramatized for effect
- To show students the difference between fictionalizing an event and transcribing from memory

- To lead into a discussion of truth and the issues surrounding memories

Directions:

This can be done in one large group, or several small groups, but there should be at least 5 people in each group. Write phrases on note cards or post-its that are at least 10-12 words long. Hand one to each group. Only allow the student beginning the game to read the phrase. That student must then whisper the phrase to the next student, cupping his hands around his mouth so the other students cannot hear. This goes on until the last student hears the phrase, and then he writes down what he thinks he heard. At the end of the game, have each group share what the first phrase was, and then what the last phrase was. Discuss how memories can be affected in the same way, and also discuss the idea of "hearsay" in memoir writing.

Activity 1: Creating an Arc

Goals:

- To understand how to frame a memoir and create an outline from a life event
- To show students the process of creating an arc

Directions:

This will be an activity each student completes by themselves. You will need paper and a pen or pencil.

An arc is the emotional framework of a memoir and is very beneficial in helping you organize the moment you are writing about. The first step is to create the "desire line." To do this, you must first answer the question: What did you want in the story? You can achieve this by simply writing a single sentence.

Ex. I wanted to be a teacher. Or, I wanted to have a llama farm.

Once you have established your desire line, you can start adding various obstacles that got in your way of achieving your goals. These will become the events of your memoir.

To begin plotting your arc, create a list of both actions and obstacles.

Ex.

I wanted _____ (the desire line).

To get it, I _____ (action).

To get it, I then _____ (action).

But _____ (obstacle) got in my way.

So, I _____ (action).

(And so on.)

Remember! You are the HERO! Obstacles are just as important as actions. They are what help drive your story forward.

Once you have written your list of actions and obstacles, it is important to find the “emotional beats” that accompany them. A “beat” is a particular event that corresponds with an emotion.

Ex.

Your event might be: “and then my mother told me she’d had an affair.” However, the beat that would go along with this event would be, “it was the first time that she made herself vulnerable to me, and for the first time in months, I really looked at her.”

Now, find some “beats” that correspond with your actions and obstacles.

Once you have completed this portion, you can begin mapping out your arc. Make an outline writing down your events followed by the accompanying beat. Plot your arc from the initiating incident, placing x’s for emotional beats, lines for action, and dashes for obstacles. Also mark where your desire line would be placed on your arc.

Once this is completed, you have a good beginning outline for your memoir. This will be your map and guide during the writing process of your story.

Activity 3: Mosaic Memoir Writing

Thinking of the short essay “The Potato Harvest” by April Monroe, write for five minutes about a specific important day that happens every year and use that to tell about some hobby or interest that you have in suggestive details.

Truth Discussion:

The *Canadian Oxford Paperback Dictionary* defines truth as “the quality or state of being true; the matter or circumstance as it really is; a true statement; something held or accepted as true” (1132). Truth is subjective. What is true to you may not be true to me and truth is distorted as soon as it is discovered...CNF does not rely on facts or truths but looks deeper: *What did he really mean by...? What was she laughing at when...?*

- Lines in the Mud: Exploring Creative Non-Fiction
Aaron Pope

The Potato Harvest

By April Monroe

This is the morning that summer ends. In one hard frost our garden has become an abandoned battlefield, the last vestiges of the living lay stiff and frozen, black wilted zucchini leaves like limp umbrellas stand as pathetic monuments, tattered flags, over what was, only yesterday, a vegetable garden. Potatoes love one heavy frost. It gives them weight and tough skins, and prepares them for the long months in the cellar. But two hard frosts will kill them, so the harvest contains uncertain urgency.

The seasons change violently here. Summer steals away like a casual lover in the night, and winter finds us like a flood, filling something. It is to be expected. Still, every year that I wake early, instinctively, to harvest the potatoes, I am disillusioned by my garden's easy surrender, the hasty defeat that comes after the long months of my ridiculous labors, bearing them up from seeds.

Two of my children are babies yet, swaddled in a state of perpetual intoxication, eager to touch, to speak, to wander this mean world, still quick to fall asleep and hard to wake up by accident. But this year, Aspen is standing at the bottom of the stairs when I look up from my shoelaces. I nod my head yes, and she scuttles to find her shoes. She follows me.



My daughter is seven now, and already I see the ways of women settling on her, the lilt to her hip, the shape of her neck as she turns to look at me, her breath like tiny clouds, the beginning of loveliness in her step.

Today, the walk to the garden is a long one. All summer it has been a meandering stroll over hot dust and through breeze-bending trees. But today the frost slips up our muslin skirts, seeps into our feet. Winter whispers to us through our summer clothes, and the minutes elongate with every crisp step.

Once there, we squat in the potato patch and claw the dirt earnestly, prying the potatoes from their solid bed. When one of us unearths a gangly bunch of them, we hold it up to the other before we sever each individual from the thick root that connects them. See here? Evidence that we have grown something. And here, the last to come up, the uterine potatoes we buried in May that sent forth these others. They are all soft black rot now, and when we throw them over the fence, they splat and make a dark stain on the earth.

Above us, the geese make their annual exodus. It is a bizarre orchestra of avian screams – the sound we have heard all our lives, yet not heard. So together we pause briefly and listen to what passes over us for a moment, before we begin again the work of harvesting potatoes.

April Monroe currently resides in Fairbanks, Alaska with her three children and husband. She is an undergraduate student with the University of Alaska.